

HPV AND PAP TESTS: INFORMATION FOR TRANSMASCULINE PEOPLE

Some transmasculine individuals may be resistant to getting the preventive healthcare they need because they may feel like acknowledging any part of their body that doesn't match with their identity will call their identity into question. This simply is not true. Getting the care you need for the body parts you do have provides you with good health that will enable you to do the many things you enjoy throughout your life. Regular screening with Pap and HPV tests in people with a cervix is an important part of preventing cervical cancer.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common infection. Some types of HPV cause warts like those found on hands. Other types can be transmitted sexually and can infect the genital area. About 14 million people are infected with HPV each year.

HPV is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact during vaginal or anal sex. It may be possible to transmit HPV through oral sex, although oral HPV infections are less common.

Most HPV infections are harmless. For most people, the immune system clears it within a few months. However, some HPV infections don't always clear naturally. When this happens, people are at risk for cervical, penile, anal, and oral cancers. With regular screenings (Pap and HPV tests) and physicals, cervical cell changes and any other abnormalities can be found, treated, and cancer prevented.

Pap and HPV Tests

A Pap test is a test to find abnormal cell changes on the cervix (cervical dysplasia). During a pelvic exam,

OVERVIEW

Regular screenings with Pap and HPV tests are recommended if you:

- Have not had genital reconstruction surgery
- Have had "lower" surgery that did not remove the cervix (this includes a partial hysterectomy)
- Have a cervix. Essentially, if you still have a cervix, it is important for you and your sexual health to have a Pap test done.

Note: If you are taking testosterone, it may change your body but it does not provide protection from HPV or cancer.

a small brush or cotton tipped applicator is used to take a sample of cervical cells. These cells are then examined to see if there are abnormal cell changes that can lead to cancer.

Unlike a Pap test, which only detects abnormal cell changes, an HPV test can identify high-risk types of HPV. High-risk types of HPV can lead to cervical cancer and this test helps healthcare providers know which people are at greatest risk.

Experts recommend that Pap tests begin no earlier than age 21. If the results are normal,

then Paps tests can be repeated every three years. Starting at age 30, co-testing with a Pap and an HPV test every five years is preferred. The HPV test has also been approved for use as primary cervical cancer screening for people age 25 and older.

If you identify as male on your insurance plan, you may have to call your insurance company to get the screening covered. If needed, ask your healthcare provider to help advocate. Most companies will cover an exam if you have a cervix.

Feel More Empowered about Your Exam

Some transmasculine individuals have faced discrimination and harassment in healthcare settings and are hesitant to engage in something that makes them feel vulnerable. If that is the case for you, here are a few tips to help you feel more empowered when going into your exam.

- Remember: You have control of the exam. If you want to stop at any time, tell your provider.
- Take your time and figure out when will be best for you to have the exam. You do not have to be screened during your first visit with a new provider.
- Find a provider you trust and one who will be respectful of you and who you are. To find a reliable provider, try asking friends or looking for reviews online.
- Bring someone with you if you need the support and let your provider know you want that person in the room with you.
- Bring headphones and your favorite music to help you relax.
- Keep your shirt on during the exam.
- Take long, deep breaths to relax your muscles.
- Communicate with your provider about what will help you feel less anxious during the exam. Do you want the provider to be quiet or talk during the exam? Do you want to do the exam slowly or get it done as soon as

- possible? Have you experienced discomfort during previous internal pelvic exams? Do you want to see the speculum so you know what to expect? If you are uncomfortable with the size, ask if there is a smaller size. Is there anything in particular that might make you feel more comfortable?
- Let your provider know what you need. If you have a hard time remembering things, write them down.

If you aren't comfortable getting a Pap or HPV test, schedule a separate visit with your healthcare provider to talk about your concerns.

Need to find a new provider?

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality has a provider directory on its website, listing providers who have affirmed their commitment to your health. Visit the site at www.glma.org.

Learn More

Learn more about cervical cancer screening, HPV, and other STIs from the American Sexual Health Association, a trusted nonprofit organization that has advocated on behalf of those at risk for STIs for more than a century. Our websites include:

www.ashasexualhealth.org
www.iwannaknow.org
www.quierosaber.org
www.nccc-online.org
www.askexpertsnow.com
www.YESmeansTEST.org

